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Atlanta Braves in exclusive negotiations to make Sarasota County new spring home

SARASOTA COUNTY - The Atlanta Braves have announced that Sarasota County is the destination for the team's new spring training complex, and the team is in exclusive negotiations with the county and its partners at the West Villages.

If the terms of an agreement can be reached, the Braves will move their spring training operations from Central Florida to Sarasota County as soon as the 2019 spring season, said Braves Chairman and CEO Terry McGuirk, who has been leading the team's efforts to secure a new spring training site.

"We appreciate the patience of all parties during this process," said McGuirk. "This is the perfect location for our team and we couldn't be more excited to be part of Sarasota County and West Villages."

In March of 2016, the Board of County Commissioners authorized County Administrator Tom Harmer to negotiate with the Braves, and in June the team asked for more time to continue the discussions.

"There's still a lot of work to do to finalize the terms, agreements and approvals necessary, but this announcement is a major step forward in the efforts to bring the Braves to our area," Harmer said. "Continuing to expand sports tourism is high on the county's list, and the opportunity to bring a major sports anchor to the City of North Port could have a significant impact in south county."

West Villages land development partners, including Mattamy Homes, have been playing a key role in the negotiations by helping to structure and secure both the public and private investments in the project.

"This is a true public-private partnership," said West Villages General Manager Marty Black. "We are excited to be at the table. The stadium complex blends well into our master plan for the area. It will become an anchor for our future entertainment district and complement our planned new downtown Main Street development."

The planned site is located within the City of North Port, with direct access to U.S. 41 and West Villages Parkway. The city will play an important role in helping finalize the terms and agreements, as well as overseeing any necessary regulatory approvals to advance the project, North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis said.

"The City of North Port is excited about the possibility of spring training and everything else a new facility would bring to our area," Lewis said. "A world-class professional baseball organization calling North Port home can only help to put our area on the map."

The parties to the agreement will be working over the next several months to finalize the terms and move forward with the project. The county plans to provide a public update on the status of the negotiations at the Jan. 24 Board of County Commissioners meeting.

"This is an exciting opportunity for the entire region," said Sarasota County Commission Chair Paul Caragiulo. "The potential economic impact for our community could be tremendous. We are looking forward to hearing more details about the negotiations next week."

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